

## COMBATING ACADEMIC ANXIETY IN CLASSROOM: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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### ABSTRACT:

Academic Anxiety is one of the important factors influencing the academic achievement of students which has negatively impacted the education systems around the world. There are so many factors that increase anxiety among students that effect academic activities in so many ways. Recent studies found that the pandemic and its reverberations had a differential effect on indicators of academic support and academic performance; varying degrees of anxiety were reported by 21% of students; and varying degrees of depressive symptoms were reported by 33.9% of students. The literature review aims to analyse the different coping strategies to enable learners to achieve their fullest potential academically.

**KEYWORDS:-** Academic Anxiety, Cognitive Styles, Psychological Motivation, Scholastic Achievement

### INTRODUCTION

Education lays the foundation for the fulfilment of a person's dreams and aspirations because it is a gateway to the opportunities. It helps a person to meet his/her career objectives and achieve an economic growth and thus builds a resourceful individual out of a raw human being. Hence one educated individual results in an educated family, taking education a long way along the future generations but owing to the 21<sup>st</sup> century competency levels and the increasing burden of school/college workload, the current issue of academic anxiety has been hampering the achievement curve of most of the learners.

According to **Lefton (1991)**, anxiety is a generalized feeling of fear and apprehension that may or may not be related to a particular event and is often accompanied by increased physiological arousal. It is one of the most studied phenomena in psychology. Anxiety is “a complex psychological condition that affects various cognitive, behavioural, and psychological states” (**Putnam, 2010**).

Though there are different types of anxiety, ‘academic anxiety’ has been considered as the prominent type of anxiety among learners. It is a mental sensitivity of uneasiness or distress in response to school or college circumstances that is perceived negatively (**Mahto and Jangir, 2012**).

This review article focuses on widening the reader’s comprehensive abilities on some of the most interesting techniques/strategies that have been tested and adopted to tackle the consequences of academic anxiety among learners.

### ACADEMIC ANXIETY

The word anxiety is derived from the Latin word, ‘anxietas’ (to choke, throttle, trouble, upset) and encompasses behavioural, affective and cognitive response to perception of danger. Anxiety is normal human emotion. In moderation, anxiety stimulates an anticipated and adaptive response to challenging or stressful event. In excess, anxiety destabilizes and hinders the performance of an individual.

Academic Anxiety is a situation-specific form of anxiety related to the educational contexts. Academic Anxiety encompasses not only test anxiety, but also anxiety about certain educational subjects in general. For instance, anxiety has been observed in students taking math, reading, science and foreign language classes (**Cassady, 2010**). It is a kind of anxiety which relates to the imminent danger from the environment of the educational institutions together with teacher and certain subjects like Mathematics, English, and Science etc. It is a mental sensitivity of uneasiness or distress in response to school or college circumstances that is perceived negatively. According to **O’Connor (2008)**, the feeling of being distressed, fearful, or stressed out as a result of school pressure is called academic anxiety.

There are so many causes of anxiety among students i.e. socio-economic status, the geographical area, occupation of the parents, size of family, parental expectations, status of the family, school environment, students environment, culture, religion, educational status of parents, type of family, individual's personality, parental involvement, limited facilities in the school, school environment for the students hence, causing all the kinds of inconvenience for students to concentrate on their studies, continuous poor performance in academics, insufficient resources, overcrowded classrooms, low level of motivation, accident, surprise test, surprise visit of the teachers at home, examination pressure, fight with friends, Academic workload, bad performance in academics, parents fight etc. (Barone, 2005).

As per the recent studies, there are five potential sources of study anxiety; exam anxiety, class presentation anxiety, mathematics anxiety, language anxiety and social anxiety. But the researcher had tried to analyze how the varied coping strategies adopted in different countries has had any impact on the levels of academic anxiety.

### 2.1. DIMENSIONS OF ACADEMIC ANXIETY

Academic Anxiety is an umbrella term comprising of various dimensions depending upon the implications and scope of seriousness of the anxiety levels among students. Some of which are discussed below:-

**Physical Academic Anxiety** – In a learning environment that tends to cause anxiety in students, the emotional and physical anxious feeling stays with them even though the stressful situation is no longer taking place. Such implication of academic anxiety dealing directly with one's physical health is termed as 'Physical Academic Anxiety'.

**Cognitive Academic Anxiety** – The 'Cognitive Academic Anxiety' is found to assess the cognitive indicators of test anxiety across the preparation and performance phases of the learning test cycle. It comes along with specific worry thoughts including negative cognitive self-statements regarding academic failure.

**Social Academic Anxiety** – Students with this type of anxiety may feel self-conscious and anxious in social or performance-based situations where they are observed by others, such as speaking in front of the class, raising their hand to answer a question, or eating in the presence of peers, always tending to avoid school or participating in class.

### 2.2. IMPACT OF ACADEMIC ANXIETY ON LEARNERS

Anxiety is not bad thing. It is true that a high level of anxiety interferes with concentration and memory, which are critical for academic success. Without any anxiety, however, most of the learners would lack the motivation to study for exams, write papers, or do daily homework leading to continuous procrastination of scholastic tasks. A moderate amount of anxiety actually helps academic performance by creating motivation.

Anxiety symptoms are extremely common in childhood and adolescence and can negatively interfere with general well-being, social-life, academic performance and development of social-skills. It is stated that anxiety symptoms are associated with impairment of memory and cognitive functions and can contribute to poor school performance and academic failure.

However, relevant studies have explained that the consequences of anxiety during test or examination may limit the educational or vocational development and promotion through the educational system. It is normal for a student to feel anxious before a test or examination, but it becomes problematic when the level of anxiety is excess. Opined that a various factor can contribute to a student's level of anxiety is excess, examples include: past experience with course, perception of course load, their inability to manage time, family issues and beliefs, which may have been shaped by a complex interplay of factors, may result to a unique reaction to a situation and lead to anxiety.

The *negative effects of anxiety* can be explained by two models namely:-

**Interference and Learning deficit models.**

According to the interference models, anxious student are distracted due to task irrelevant to their cognition abilities and facing domineering negative thoughts during examinations, while the learning deficit model proposes that it is student's ineffective study habits during preparation for an examination that causes them to be anxious.

### **PREVIOUS STUDIES ON COPING WITH ACADEMIC ANXIETY**

The present review of literature will consider the conceptual phenomena as well as the variables under study to assess empirical clarifications behind the various methods implemented to overcome academic anxiety in order to improve the scholastic achievement of learners.

**MimasKamour, Bahjat Hamid Altakhayneh (2021)** conducted a study on '**Impact of a counselling program based on social emotional learning toward reducing math anxiety in middle school students**' in the International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction(Vol.13, NO.3).This study investigated the impact of a counselling program based on social emotional learning in reducing math anxiety in middle school students. In light of the results of the study, the researchers recommend the use of a counselling program based on social emotional learning, to reduce math anxiety among middle school students.

**Amit Kumar Mandal, Dr. Shweta Talesara (2021)** conducted "**A Study of Reducing Student Stress in Classroom in India.**" This work investigates the academic stress and mental health of Indian high school students and the associations between various psychosocial factors and academic stress among a total of 190 students from grades 11 and 12. Nearly two-thirds (63.5%) of the students reported stress due to academic pressure with no significant differences across gender, age, grade, and several other personal factors. About two-thirds (66%) of the students reported feeling pressure from their parents for better academic performance, thus one of the potential methods to combat academic stress is by counseling parents to cultivate positive behavioral shift of learning with their children.

**Dominikus David B. S. (2021)** has conducted a study on '**Cognitive Behavioral-Active Music Pastoral Therapy for Millennials' Academic Anxiety: How & Why**'. This study used quasi-experimental design with repeated measures (pre-test, post-test, and follow-up). Based on the post-test and the follow-up comparison, active music therapy was effective in reducing academic anxiety after two weeks of the treatment. Active music therapy which is integrated in group counseling not only can overcome individual problems, but the therapies can also help individuals analyze their own thoughts and behavior.

**Yang, Z., Asbury, K. & Griffiths, M.D.(2019)** worked on '**An Exploration of Problematic Smartphone Use among Chinese University Students: Associations with Academic Anxiety, Academic Procrastination, Self-Regulation and Subjective Wellbeing.**' The present study explored the prevalence and correlates of problematic smartphone use (PSU) among Chinese university students. Few studies have investigated relationships between PSU and factors such as academic anxiety, academic procrastination, self-regulation, and subjective wellbeing leading to the suggestive remedies on creating awareness among learners about the optimization of smartphones for academic purposes instead of misusing the same.

**Toma Natalia (2018)** conducted a study on '**Establishing the interconnection peculiarities of academic anxieties - cognitive styles for students and diminishing/regulating this state through psychological and educational mechanisms**'. The researcher aimed to do an analysis of the problem of anxiety and cognitive styles in the literature and to diagnose the manifestation of academic anxiety in students with different cognitive styles. The applicative value of the research consists in: identifying the level of academic anxiety at students according to the cognitive style, but also establishing the interconnection peculiarities academic anxiety – cognitive style and configuring the profile of the student with high degree of academic anxiety; developing and implementing the program and strategies for regulating/diminishing academic anxiety at students; thus helping learners overcome their academic anxiousness by regulating their psychological aspects pertaining to education.

**Mili Rashmi (2017)** conducted a study on '**A study of the academic achievement in relation to academic anxiety and academic motivation of secondary school students of Lower Assam**'. The researcher aims to

study the differences in Academic Anxiety between high and low achievers of Class IX students according to which, the majority of the students (53.46%) were found to have high academic anxiety. A very few number of students (11.36%) falls in the category of average academic anxiety and a good number of them (35.18%) were found to have low academic anxiety. When the total sample was taken, majority (55.88%) were found to have average academic motivation. While a good number of students (36.69%) were found to have low academic motivation. Only a very few number of students (7.43%) were found to have high academic motivation signifying to the importance of high motivation in enabling learners to be comparatively higher academic achievers than the ones not motivated.

**Jegadha S (2016)** conducted a study on ‘**Academic anxiety stress coping ability and parental support in relation to academic achievement of higher secondary students**’. The researcher aims to investigate the academic anxiety, stress coping ability, and parental support in relation to academic achievement of higher secondary students. The major finding of this study is that optimum academic anxiety, stress coping ability and inclusive parental support enhances the higher secondary students’ academic achievement while reducing the aftermath of academic anxiousness among the students.

**Sahu, Saroj (2015)** conducted a study on ‘**Academic anxiety among school students of Chhattisgarh and role of personality, culture and gender**’. The researcher aims to study the role of personality, culture and gender in the academic anxiety of the school going students of Chhattisgarh. The major findings of this study are that all the personality factors are significantly correlated with academic anxiety. Urban students have shown more academic anxiety than the tribal. Similarly, females have been found to show more academic anxiety than males. It has indirectly signified to the seriousness of the study workload laid upon the shoulders of urban students compared to the rural students.

**Matthew Owens, Jim, Julie, Roger (2012)** conducted a study on ‘**Anxiety and depression in academic performance: An exploration of the mediating factors of worry and working memory**’. The researchers aimed to study how Anxiety and depression are linked to lower academic performance. It is proposed that academic performance is reduced in young people with high levels of anxiety or depression as a function of increased test-specific worry that impinges on working memory central executive processes. Higher levels of anxiety and depression were associated with lower academic performance. There was support for a mediation hypothesis, where worry and central executive processes mediated the link between negative affect and academic performance.

**Singapore, Navnath Venkatrao (2011)** conducted a study on ‘**A psychological investigation of influence of language on academic anxiety, self-concept and adjustment process among rural and urban students of Marathwada region**’. The researcher aims to study the level of academic anxiety among students belongs to rural and urban area; the level of academic anxiety among students in relation to their gender and the self-concept among students belongs to rural and urban area. The major findings of this study are :- Students belong to urban community were found to be significantly higher in their level of academic anxiety as compare to those who belongs to rural community; English medium students were found with significantly less anxiety in their academic curriculum as compare to Marathi students; Academic anxiety in students was found to be gender specific, Male students were found to be significantly higher in their level of academic anxiety as compare to female students. All these profound results clarified the need to cater to the academic needs of both male and female students by giving individual intervention to their levels of academic anxiety.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In the following section, the researcher presents some recommendations for teachers, parents and learners to help overcome their academic anxiety to enhance the teaching-learning process:

1. Learners must be equipped to develop strong academic skills to improve their academic achievement as test anxiety is frequently caused by poor preparation.
2. If students feel fear from test then there is used to inculcate different skills like relaxation, visualization, self-talk, etc., and all these help to reduce their academic anxiety.

3. As a teacher, use self-talk positive statements whenever students feel anxiety from academic activities. It helps students to replace their negativity toward academic activities.
4. If students feel academic anxiety teacher need to expand fears and make them realize that their fears are unrealistic.
5. Inclusion of psychological intervening activities as part of scholastic curriculum would help to combat their academic anxiety.
6. Teacher should remember the goal not to avoid anxiety to manage anxiety that hinders the students' academic performance. Instead, sufficient attention and remedial measures are to be taken to motivate the learners.
7. Musical therapy and sports activities must be encouraged for all types of learners in order to make them scholastically strong achievers.
8. Parents should try to identify the academic anxiety in their children as soon as possible so that benefitting counselling sessions could be administered for the academic progress and socio-psychological welfare of the child.

### CONCLUSION

Academic Anxiety is a wide ocean in which future researchers may investigate further in relation to its various intervening variables like sleeping disorder, self-esteem, mental health, life satisfaction, learning engagement, happiness, and narcissism, etc. In this paper, the researcher reviewed some important issues pertinent to the seriousness of academic anxiety among the learning population. The literature review indicated that introduction of creative and innovative methodologies are needed the most to overcome the repercussions of academic anxiety. Teachers and parents should be convinced of the importance of motivating students and proceed to encourage them towards scholastic achievement. The review revealed that when innovational techniques are used appropriately, it can bring about a lot of advantages to teachers and learners. It is a resource that can be used by learners because it helps them solve their academic anxiety and find methods to use what they have learnt in ways that are effective and meaningful. To sum up, the findings of this literature review showed that the right approaches towards combating academic anxiety provides interaction between teachers and learners, provides comprehensible input and output, helps learners to develop better learning skills, makes learning and teaching more student-centered, promotes learners' high scholastic achievement and helps them feel more confident, and increases learners' motivation to effectively learn and progress in every sphere of their lives.

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